

MORE CHALLENGING QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

Lesson 1 w/answers

Predestination

"Are we predestined? Does God call certain people who will be saved and certain people who will not be saved no matter what?"

The doctrine and study of Predestination is something many have struggled with and is often misunderstood. We need to understand that as we briefly look at this today what predestination is not in order to understand what it is.

Before we accept or define any doctrine, some rules have to apply - the primary one being that one doctrine and its definition cannot be in conflict with, or deny, another doctrine. God's word is complete, and it is whole; it is not at odds with itself. God's word is unifying and accomplishes his purpose.

The Bible tells us it is like a two-edged sword, and with it we can know the truth, and the truth will set us free. This is key, because it means that when we come across something that does not seem to fit with our system of beliefs, we need to look at it closely. We need to ask ourselves if we have misunderstood something, or whether we are applying this new thing correctly.

Secondly, we need to see what God's entire word says about the subject, versus our attempting to build a doctrine, a teaching, a truth, on just one or two misapplied verses.

"I heard that God predestined those He foreknew. Those He foreknew were ones He knew and has a relationship with. I was told that God has already chosen certain people to exercise their right of choice to choose Him, and some He has predestined to never use their right of choice to choose Him."

These assertions regarding predestination are ones that we've heard before. They imply that God, driven by his own motives, and unknown to us, decided in the beginning who He would save and who he would not. From this assumption, a doctrine is then constructed which says essentially that we are now simply living out the life predestined for us. The outcome is known to God, and we have no real sway over that outcome.

Let's allow all of God's word to speak to us today as we look at this important doctrine.

1. Read the following verses which are normally quoted to support the doctrine of predestination, and note what they seem to indicate:
 - a. Romans 9:13
 - i. ANSWER: ¹³Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." [NIV]
 - b. Romans 9:17-18
 - i. ANSWER: ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. [NIV]
 - c. John 6:70-71
 - i. ANSWER: ⁷⁰Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" ⁷¹(He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.) [NIV]

2. Often the verses cited above are used to build a doctrinal position that God only has certain people in mind as far as who will inherit the Kingdom of God, i.e., he determines *a priori* who will be "saved" and who will not. It naturally follows from this teaching, that God actually creates people whose hearts he will harden, thus preventing them from being saved. God does this so that He can accomplish something with them as hardened or evil individuals. Let's look at what both the previous as well as the following verses *really* say to us regarding this teaching, and let's see if they support it or contradict it.

a. Those who believe in predestination would employ the scripture references in question 1 above to assert that God "used" Esau, Pharaoh, and Judas to accomplish his will, and that there was a sinister intent behind it. In essence, God created these three individuals so that He could harden them and bend them to do His will. Is this a correct inference from these verses?

i. ANSWER: Nothing could be further from the truth. When we look at these verses in context, we see that in all three cases, these men acted based upon their free will. Yes, they were evil or had evil thoughts, but we all do. Certainly at times, the disciples did as well; but it was only Judas chose to reject Christ and turn against him. The other disciples, although also struggling with sin, pride, etc., chose to follow Christ. The same was true with Pharaoh and Esau. These were not righteous men that God turned into hardened people; rather, they had consistently demonstrated time-and-time-again the actions of their evil and cold hearts. God did not reject nor harden them; they rejected God.

b. What can we learn from Isaiah 45:21-23?

i. ANSWER 1:

*²¹"Declare what is to be, present it—
let them take counsel together.
Who foretold this long ago,
who declared it from the distant past?
Was it not I, the LORD?
And there is no God apart from me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is none but me.*

*²²"Turn to me and be saved,
all you ends of the earth;
for I am God, and there is no other.*

*²³By myself I have sworn,
my mouth has uttered in all integrity
a word that will not be revoked:
Before me every knee will bow;
by me every tongue will swear." [NIV]*

ii. ANSWER 2: We see that God wants all to be saved, and He wants to save all mankind.

c. What does Matthew 7:13-14 tell us?

i. ANSWER 1: *¹³"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." [NIV]*

ii. ANSWER 2: It tells us that Christ knew and taught that only a few would actually choose the right path, even though everyone has that choice.

d. What is revealed to us in Matthew 7:21-23?

i. ANSWER 1: *²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" [NIV]*

ii. ANSWER 2: We are told that many will pretend to be followers of Christ and lovers of God, but God knows the pretenders and will not allow them into the kingdom.

- e. Finally, what does Matthew 7:24 tell us about the universality of God's grace?
 - i. ANSWER 1: ²⁴"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." [NIV]
 - ii. ANSWER 2: Note again God's desire for "everyone" to enter His Kingdom, to be saved -- but only those who choose to follow Him will be saved; they have to choose. There is free will for all, but the key is how that free will is used.
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Clearly we can see from just these few scripture references (and there are many more), that God desires all of his creation to be saved, not just a selected few which he chooses in advance. But of course it is equally clear that God knew, as did Jesus, that man's heart is inclined to do evil. That is the struggle Paul writes of in Romans Chapters 8 and 9, and it is the struggle that we all have between sin and righteousness. It is the struggle between wanting to follow our own will, our own lusts, and our own desires -- versus our desire to follow God's will.

God knew that man, on his own, was incapable of saving himself. It was because of God's great love for His creation, and for mankind in particular, that before He created anything, He already knew his only son Jesus would need to come and die for us, in order to make the atonement needed to reconcile us back to the relationship that God originally intended for us.

What then is the answer? What about the predestination referred to in the Bible? As I have mentioned from time to time in our studies, God is a God of purpose, and He is a God of order who has an eternal plan; He is not a God of chaos. God has predestined a pattern, a path, and a plan that he put in place before He created us. His plan for the redemption of His creation is a part of that predestination.

This plan does not eliminate at all man's use of free will. It does, however, fix the consequences of exercising that will. It is not a predestined outcome for a select few, but a predestined outcome for all. Those who choose to follow God will have one outcome, and it is the same for all who choose this path. Similarly, those who choose not to follow God will have one outcome, and it is the same for all those who choose this path. These consequences are what has been predestined. God does know who will choose each path, but he leaves the choosing up to us. It is not pre-wired into us; we are not robots, and God is not a manipulator. We do indeed have sufficient free will to make whatever decisions we choose, but the outcome of those decisions has been predetermined, both for good and for evil.

When Christ came to proclaim the Good News, i.e., the "Gospel", He came to tell all mankind that, although our sin and evil desires casted us out of God's kingdom and separated us eternally from God, He came to bridge that separation. The Good News is that we can be reconciled to God, we can be saved from the coming judgment of the wicked, and we can have an eternal life with God. This is, and has always been, our choice. God has provided a way that all can be saved, not just some select few, but all. However, we have to choose Jesus. If we do, our eternal destination is known; it is predetermined, and we as followers of Christ are predestined to spend it with Him!

In our next lesson, we will examine the doctrine of Free Grace. We will also address the question of Atonement, and the question about our being "enemies of Christ".

My prayer is that you will take comfort in knowing that you have placed your faith in the eternal Christ, the Savior; and that regardless of our level (or lack) of understanding, our faith is NOT misplaced. As amazing as it may seem at times, we are going to spend an eternity with Him. Yes; in spite of who we are we are going to be eternal citizens of His kingdom! Celebrate that great gift this week and thank Christ for all that He has done for you.

In Christ, **Wes**